SERMON

Preached at the

Triennal Confirmation

OF THE

Right Reverend Father in GOD

RICHARD

L. Bishop of *Bath* and *Wells*

HELD AT

BRIDGEWATER, on the [illegible]

Day of *August*, 16[illegible]

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TO THE
Right Reverend Father in GOD,
RICHARD
Lord Bishop of *Bath* and *Wells*.

My Lord,

THis Sermon, which was Preached at Your Lordships Command, and Printed at the Request of Your Clergy, naturally flyes to the Altar for Protection; and if it may be allowed to take Sanctuary there, it will not fear the Censure or Assaults of any Adversaries. The subject matter of it being concerning Spiritual Gifts, 'tis in a manner intituled to the Care and Patronage of Spiritual Persons; and especially of Your Lordship, who is deservedly placed in the highest Rank and Order of them. If any Evil Spirits shall arise, and oppose these Gifts of the Holy Ghost, as Jannes and Jambres of old withstood Moses, and Simon Magus and others resisted the Apostles, we need not doubt but the Author of them will help us to defend the Argument, and the Finger of God will elude the Magical Enchantments both of Atheism and Enthusiasme.

If this Discourse may any ways help forward the right use of these Spiritual Gifts; if it may serve to correct the

Abuse of them in some, or to discountenance the vain Pretences to them in others, it may perhaps prove one of the Best Gifts that could be Presented to the Church by one of the meanest Well-wishers to it.

My Lord,

I have Obeyed Your Lordships Command, which the Obligations of Duty and Gratitude must ever make me willing and ready to do.

That all Your Clergy may Reverence and Obey Your Lordship as their Spiritual Father, and that Your Lordship may long continue to be a Blessing and Support to Your Clergy, is the Hearty Prayer of,

My Lord,

Your Lordships most Obedient and

Devoted Servant,

MATTHEW HOLE.

A SER-

A SERMON

Preached at the

Triennial Visitation, &c.

1 COR. xii. Last Verse.

But covet earnestly the best gifts: And yet I shew unto you a more excellent way.

THE great Subject of this Chapter is concerning Spiritual Gifts, which the Apostle in his entrance upon it, declares to be so useful and necessary a piece of Knowledge, that he would by no means Ver. 1. have us ignorant of it. And to the end that the Christian Church might be rightly instructed in so Divine and Excellent a Subject, he here treats at large concerning the Author, the number, the use, and the distribution of these Spiritual Gifts.

For the Author, he declares it to be no other than the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person in the ever Blessed and Adorable Trinity, whose peculiar Office in the Oeconomy of Mans Salvation, is to edifie and instruct the Church of Christ,

Christ, for which we are so entirely beholding to this Holy
Ver. 3. Spirit, that no Man can say, that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. And they are called therefore Spiritual Gifts, not because they are seated in the Spiritual part or Soul of Man, but because they proceed from the Spirit of God.

From the Author, he goes on to the number and variety of these Spiritual Gifts, reckoning up in the 4th and following Verses, The Word of Wisdom, the Word of Knowledge, the Gift of Prophecy, the Gift of Healing, the gift of Tongues, and the Interpretation of Tongues, and the like: All which diversity of Gifts he tells us, *flow from the same Spirit, and their different operations from the same Lord, who worketh all in all*; that is, who worketh all these Gifts in all that have them.

And least we should mistake the design of the Holy Ghost in bestowing these Gifts, he proceeds to direct us in the right
Ver. 7. end and use of them, telling us, *That the manifestation of the Spirit was given to every one to profit withal*; that is, not barely to procure some private profit to themselves, but for the publick good and benefit of others: They were not given for vanity and ostentation, to set forth our selves by our Eloquence, or any Elaborate Arts of Speech, much less to raise Schisms and Factions, but to advance the Peace, Unity and Edification of the Church.

Then lastly, for the distribution of these Gifts, he tells us, that they are not all given to one, nor are the same given to all, but they are scattered with an admirable variety and in different measures on the sons of Men, that like the various Members of the Natural Body, they might be all helpful and
Ver. 28, serviceable to one another; *Are all apostles*, saith he? *are all*
29, 30. *prophets? are all teachers? do all speak with tongues? do all*
Eph. 4. *interpret?* No, *He hath given some to be apostles, some pro-*
11, 12. *phets, some evangelists, some pastors, and some teachers*; and

all

all this *for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ.*

And having thus discoursed at large of the nature, end and use of these Spiritual Gifts, he closes the Chapter with this excellent advice of our Text, *Covet earnestly the best gifts*: And for an introduction to the following Chapter, adds, *And yet I shew unto you a more excellent way.*

The words will require a little Explication, before I can sum up the sense, or speak clearly to them.

First, Then by *gifts* here, there can be no doubt but the Apostle chiefly intended those supernatural and extraordinary gifts of Tongues, Miracles, Prophecy, and the like, which were rife and common in those days; and were indeed necessary in the Infancy of the Church, for the confirmation of the Gospel, and to gain Proselites to the belief of it: But those extraordinary and miraculous Gifts having long since ceased, together with the reason of them, may not now be the object of our Ambition; and therefore the Apostles advice here may be, and usually is, extended likewise to the natural and acquired gifts of the Spirit, which are necessary still to propagate the Doctrine of the Gospel, as it now stands confirmed and derived down to us: Of this kind are those intellectual habits and endowments of the Mind, by the improvement whereof, some attain to a greater skill in the Tongues, others excel in the knowledge of Arts and Sciences, by which means Men come to have different Talents, and are diversly qualified for publick service: All which gifts, together with the improvement of them, proceed still from the same Spirit, and are given for the same use, even the good and benefit of Mankind; and these will be continued to the end of the World, only with this difference, that whereas the former were conferred on the Apostles, and others, by Inspiration and sudden Infusion, and so they needed only to be directed to the right use of them; these latter are now conveyed to us by the ordinary Methods of

of Study and Diligence, and so we are to be taught, both how to get, and how to use them as we ought. These are the *gifts*. But,

Secondly, What does the Apostle mean by the *best gifts*? For that term denotes not only a diversity, but a preference of some above others. In Answer to which, by the *best gifts* here, we are to understand not absolutely the best in every kind, but those that were most useful, and tended most to the edification of the Church; for the Apostle having before
Ver. 7. asserted, *That the manifestation of the Spirit was given to every one to profit withal*: Whatever most promoted that end was reckoned in the number of the *best gifts*; so that whether the Apostle referred here to the gift of Tongues, which was very necessary at that time, when the Gospel was to be Preached to People of divers Nations and Languages, or whether he had an eye to the gift of Miracles, which gave the greatest credit to their Doctrine, and begat the highest assent and veneration to it; or whatever else were the particular Gifts referr'd to, 'tis plain the Apostle meant by them, such as best edified the Church; and consequently by Analogy, we are still to reckon those the *best gifts* whereby we may best profit and edifie our Hearers. But,

Thirdly, What is the Apostles meaning in bidding us to covet these Gifts, and that earnestly too? To covet in Scripture is sometimes taken in a very bad sense, and there is one whole Precept in the Decalogue directly level'd against it. Indeed to covet any of our Neighbours Goods, or to use any indirect arts to compass them, is a vile and detestable piece of Covetousness, but to desire the gifts of God for the good of Mankind, and to seek to enrich our Mind with the highest and best abilities to promote his Glory, is a noble and laudable Ambition; and this is what the Apostle here recommends to us. But,

Fourthly, What is that more excellent way which he here directs to? *And yet I shew unto you a more excellent way.* The words

words in the Original are, Καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ὁδὸν ὑμῖν δείκνυμι. *I shew unto you a way to attain to a greater excellency than any the best gifts can advance you to.* And what's that? Why 'tis the Graces of the Spirit, as appears by what follows, where the Apostle immediately falls upon the excellent Grace of Charity, which as it comprizes the Love of God and our Neighbour, is the complex or summary of all Christian Graces; and to set forth its excellence, he prefers it far above all other Gifts or Endowments whatever; as we shall shew hereafter.

From the words thus explained, we may easily gather these two Propositions.

I. That the Ministers and Pastors of the Church ought earnestly to covet and labour for the *best gifts*; that is, those especially that tend most to the Benefit and Edification of the Church.

II. That the Graces of the Spirit are more excellent than the Gifts of it, and therefore ought to be more earnestly coveted and laboured for.

These two useful and seasonable Truths shall be the subject of our ensuing Discourse; and I begin with the first of them, *viz.*

I. That the Ministers and Pastors of the Church ought earnestly to covet and labour for the *best gifts*; that is, such especially as conduce most to the Benefit and Edification of their Hearers. St. *Paul* gave this direction with reference to those extraordinary Gifts that were rife in his time, that they should covet and seek after the best of them. And the Reason being still the same, we are concerned likewise, even in those ordinary Gifts that are continued to us, to desire those most that are likelyest to do most good. In treating therefore of this Proposition, I must inquire,

First, What are now the beſt or moſt beneficial Gifts for the uſe of the Church? And,

Secondly, How we are to covet and ſeek after them.

For the *First*, Before I can ſhew you what are now the moſt uſeful and beneficial Gifts for the good of the Church, I muſt put you in mind of four or five Gifts or Talents in Prayer and Preaching, which are none of the beſt, though they have been too much affected in our days. And the

1. I ſhall mention of theſe, is, The Gift of Extemporary Effuſions in Prayer, which ſome have miſcalled, *The beſt of Prayer*. This is not much to be affected, nor to be reckon'd in the number of the *beſt gifts*; for this inſtead of edifying hath greatly diſturbed the Peace of the Church, and deſtroyed the Reverence and Harmony of Publick Worſhip. *Solomon*, who hath been juſtly reputed the Wiſeſt of Men, hath will'd us, *Not to be raſh with our mouth, nor haſty to*
Eccl. 5. 2 *utter any thing before God, but to conſider that God is in heaven, and we are upon earth, therefore our words unto him ſhould be few.* Meaning that we ſhould never approach the Divine Majeſty, but with the profoundeſt Awe and Reverence; and that is beſt ſignified by few and well weigh'd Expreſſions in our Addreſſes to him: And therefore a greater than *Solomon*, even our Bleſſed Saviour himſelf, the Head and Founder of his Church, preſcribed a Form of Prayer to be uſed by his Diſciples and followers; and the Chriſtian Church according to his order, hath uſed the ſame ever ſince, and likewiſe compoſed her Publick Liturgies according to that excellent Platform: And thanks be to God, our Church hath at this day one of the moſt pious and beſt compoſed Liturgies that is extant in the Chriſtian World; ſo that now we need only bring ardent deſires and good affections in the uſe of it, and we need not doubt a gracious anſwer and acceptance. There was indeed in the days of the Apoſtles an extraordinary gift of Praying by Inſpiration, called ſometimes, *Praying by the Spirit*, which was neceſſary in the beginning

beginning of Christianity; when as the Apostle tells us, *They knew not how or what to pray for as they ought*; but when the Holy Spirit of God had dictated the holy Scriptures, wherein we are directed both as to the matter and manner of our Prayers; when the sacred Canon was compleated, and Publick Prayers composed according to the directions of it, then this among other extraordinary Gifts ceased, together with the reason of it; for the Spirit of God which doth nothing in vain, is not wont to give extraordinary assistances when ordinary means will serve the turn.

So that all the gift of Prayer now remaining in the Church, consists not in pouring out many and new words, but in the pious Motions, and good Affections of the Heart: *The Spirit helps our infirmities still*; but how? Not by furnishing us with new Phrases and variety of Expressions, which God is no way delighted with, *but with sighs and groans*, saith the Apostle, *that cannot be uttered*; that is, by exciting the inward desires and breathings of the Soul after him: Hence we read that the poor *Publicans* short Letany, *Lord be merciful to me a Sinner*, prevail'd more for his Justification than the tedious Harangues of the *Pharisee*; which Sect, though in outward pretence and appearance the strictest in those times, our Saviour blames for their Babling and vain Repetitions in Prayer, as if they thought to be heard for their much speaking: And 'tis well known, what crude and indigested, not to say blasphemous, Speeches have drop'd from the Mouths of such bold pretenders to inspir'd Prayers. The truth is, this Extemporary way of Praying was a thing unknown in the Primitive and purer Ages of the Church, and hath plainly appeared to be a late Invention, brought into these Kingdoms by the subtlety of Popish Emissaries, meerly to distract and divide the People; and we know how they triumph in the Schisms and Confusions that have been raised by it: which is enough to put us out of conceit with this Gift, and the pretenders to it.

Rom. 8. 26.

Luke 18 10, 11, 14.

2. The Affectation of Tone, or the vehemence of Voice or Gesture in Prayer or Preaching serve not the true ends of Edification, and therefore may be reckoned rather among the Artifices of Seducers, than in the number of the *best gifts*; for Religion is a grave and serious thing, and makes its way into the Heart, rather by powerful Arguments than
Kin. 19. by a powerful Noise. We read in Scripture, that God was
1, 12. not in the Earthquake, nor in the Tempest, but in the small and still voice; And the efficacy of Gods Word is better convey'd by calm and sound Reasonings, than by the loudest blusters of Action or Utterance: Such Bodily exercise profiteth little, and is better suited to the Levity of the Stage, than to the Gravity of the Pulpit. Affected Tones and Gestures may indeed raise the Fancy, and over-heat the Imagination, but seldom or never leave any true or lasting warmth upon the Heart or the Affections; they may serve to astonish and startle weak People for the present, but the impression quickly wears off, and passeth away with the motion or sound that raised it. And therefore 'tis observed of those that use or follow those Arts, that though they may seem affected for a while, yet they never prove either the wiser, or the better Men. Length and Lowdness were the main ingredients of the *Pharisees* Prayers; for which we find our Saviour often condemning their Hypocrisie, but never commending their Devotion. All that have had any game to play upon the People, have betook themselves to such Wiles, and by this Craft have got their Wealth, and made Merchandize of them.

But as it hath been the Honour of the Regular Clergy, not to affect such Mean Arts, so 'twill be the Wisdom of the Laity to beware of being deluded by those that use them.

3. The gift of divers Tongues, or the ostentation of several Languages in Popular Sermons, is of little or no use, and therefore not to be affected by us: For the Vulgar are little

little edified by *Latin*; and 'tis Proverbial among them to say, of what they understand not, *That 'tis Greek to them*: So that the use of these Tongues in our Discourses to them can be of no advantage; they may serve to amuse and confound them, but cannot any ways inform or help their understandings: 'Tis true indeed the study and knowledge of the Tongues are necessary to qualifie and accomplish a Divine, seeing the Holy Scriptures, and many great and useful parts of Learning are written in those Languages: But of what use the embellishing or interlarding our Discourses with them to the Common People should be, is not easie to understand. The Apostle blames Praying and Prophecying in a Tongue not known to the People: And so far as we intermix these things, we speak unto them in an unknown Tongue. 1 Cor. 14

To this may be added the using of Hard Words, and Terms of Art, that are above the reach of Vulgar Understandings, speaking as the Apostle expresses it, *great swelling words of vanity*, and affecting Science falsly so called. 2 Pet. 2. 18. 1 Tim. 1. 20.

As also the Clouding our Discourses with Mystical Phrases and Uncouth Expressions; such as the Incomings and Outlettings, the Beamings and Streamings of the Spirit, with such like unintelligible Jargon; whereby some Men instead of making difficult things plain, have made plain things difficult, which is a very fruitless and unprofitable Talent.

4. The Ostentation of Wit, or Curiosity of Language in our Publick Discourses tend little or nothing to Edification, and therefore may not be reckoned among the *best gifts*. Witty Sayings and fine Sentences may indeed tickle the Ears, but never sink into the Heart; they may please a while, and afford matter of Talk, but they seldom or never profit the Hearers. St. *Paul* that great converter of Souls, declares that his *Preaching consisted not in the wisdom of words, but in the demonstration of the Spirit*. He studied not fineness of Expression, but soundness of Doctrine: And 1 Cor. 2. 4.

we

we read that the simplicity of the Gospel prevailed more, than a vain ostentation of Wit could ever do, and *the* 1 Cor. 1. 21. *foolishness of preaching triumphed over all the wisdom of the wise.* Our Business (my Brethren!) is not to gratifie itching Ears, but to save Mens Souls; and that is better done by grave, solid and practical Discourses, than by the most florid and polite Preachments, which may delight for the present, but bring no lasting Benefit or Instruction with them: For as the plainest Food nourishes more than the most delicious Kickshaws, so plain Truths without Art or Varnish, oft-times leave deeper impressions on the Mind, than all the Charms of Humane Eloquence.

Lastly, The Art of straining the words of Scripture, and forcing them from their plain and genuine Sense, is none of the *best gifts*: This is done sometimes by Criticks, who to advance a new Notion will stretch and pervert the Holy Scripture, and by the help of Invention, and the ambiguity of Words and Particles, offer violence to a Text, and even take it by force. Our Blessed Saviour rebuk'd the *Pharisees* Mat. 5. for their false Glosses, by which they made void the Law of God: And these Men justly incur the same Censure, who by their wild and strain'd Interpretations make the Gospel of Christ of none effect.

There are others, who to serve the Interest of a Party, will rack and torture the Scriptures, to make them speak what they please: Hence some have used the Bible as the most successful Engine to overturn Church and State, and have made the Gospel of Peace, the Trumpet of War and Sedition. This is a most pernicious Talent, and hath done unspeakable mischief. St. *Peter* tells us of some, who 2 Pet. 3. wrest the Scripture to their own Damnation: And we have heard of others, who have wrested them to the ruine and subversion of Kingdoms, and have so far rack'd some Passages of Sacred Writ, as even to force them to speak Blood and Confusion.

But

But our Apostle does not here will us to covet, but to abhor such vile and detestable Arts.

And thus having mentioned some of those Gifts, which though too much in vogue, are yet none of the best, I proceed now to those more useful Talents and Abilities, that tend most to the Edification of the Church, and therefore ought to be coveted by us as the *best gifts*.

To which end, we must note, that the two great parts of Edification, are Knowledge and Practice.

The former gives Men the right understanding of Holy Mysteries: And the latter teaches them to square their Lives and Actions according to them. And consequently the *best gifts* are those that enable us,

First, To settle and inform Mens Judgments aright in the knowledge of the Truth. And,

Secondly, To excite their Affections to the Love and Practice of it.

First, I say, We are to covet those as the *best gifts* that enable us to inform and settle Mens Judgments aright, in the knowledge of the Truth. Here we must begin; for if we go about to move and stir the Affections, before the Mind be well informed, we shall beget a Heat without Light, or a Zeal without Knowledge, which will be of very evil and dangerous Consequence. Our Apostle tells us, *That 'tis good to be zealously affected*; but then he limits it, *always to a good thing*: And therefore the Mind must be well instructed in the goodness of the thing, before we excite to the love or pursuit of it, otherwise Zeal may spend it self, as it too often does, upon very bad matters: And this is the root and foundation of all Fanaticism. For some Teachers seek to work upon and warm the Passions of Men, before their Judgments are well informed, and thereby make- Gal. 4. 18.

make their Hearers zealous for or against things, without giving them the right understanding of either; and this hath begot those intemperate heats in Religion, which have frequently broke out to the disturbance of Church and State!

The Affections which are too apt to inflame, are very unfit to guide, and therefore they must not outrun, but follow the understanding, and be guided by the dictates of a well informed Judgment; for else how easily may the undue fervours of the Mind lead to the heats of Enthusiasme, or the weaknesses of Superstition? And how frequently have they that have been too hasty and eager in raising the Affections, made sad work with the Passions of Men?

2 Tim. 3. 7. Eph. 4. 14. By this means, some have been *ever learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth*, being unstable in their Principles, and like *children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine; by the cunning craftiness of those that lay in wait to deceive.*

To edifie then, or profit our Hearers, we must begin with their Judgments, and indeavour to settle them aright in the great Points of Religion: For as in the Creation of the World, the first thing created was Light, and that dispelled the Darkness of the rude and unformed Chaos; even so in the new Creation, the first thing must be to let in a clear and convincing light upon the Soul, and that will scatter all the mists of Error and Ignorance.

To this end Catechizing will be of very great use, to instruct Children betimes in the Principles of Religion, to instill into them the knowledge of God, and to season their tender Years with an Early Piety: By thus *training up children betimes in the way that they should go*, Prov. 22. 6. *Solomon* hath told us, *that when they are old, they will not depart from it.*

As they grow up, we must explain to them the Nature and Obligation of their Baptismal Vow, giving them to understand what they have promised, and how they may

be

be enabled to perform it. When they come to greater Maturity, we are to let them know upon what grounds the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith ſtand, that they may not be ſhaken from the belief of them: And this will be beſt done by a plain and eaſie Expoſition of the Apoſtles Creed.

After this, we are to ſhew them the excellency and extent of the Divine Law by a fuller Explication of the *Decalogue*, or Ten Commandments, deſcribing the Nature of every particular Vertue and Vice, required and forbidden in them: So ſhall we open their Eyes to ſee the wondrous things of Gods Law; we ſhall lead them as it were by the hand into the paths of Righteouſneſs, and guide their feet into the ways of Truth and Peace. And having thus fixed and ſettled their Judgments in the knowledge of Divine Truths, we are then to apply our ſelves to the Pſal. 119. 18.

Second part of Edification; and to covet thoſe Gifts that may beſt ſerve to move their Affections, and to ſtir them up to the love and practice of their Duty. And here we may ſafely uſe all the Arts of Divine Rhetorick, and betake our ſelves to the moſt prevailing Topicks and Methods of Perſwaſion: Here we may deſcribe the lovelineſs and rewards of Vertue, ſetting forth in the moſt lively colours the Beauty of Holineſs, that Men may be enamour'd and fall in love with it: Here we may repreſent the uglyneſs and deformity of Vice, painting it in the blackeſt and moſt odious ſhape, to beget the greater abhorrence and deteſtation of it. When we would reveal the Wrath of God from Heaven againſt Sinners, we may appear as on Mount *Sinai*, in Thunder and Lightning, to make (if poſſible) the ſturdieſt Sinners to quake and tremble. When we would diſplay the Riches of Divine Grace in the Work of Mans Redemption, we may like our Saviour on the Mount of *Olives*, breathe out nothing but Joy and Bleſſedneſs, and with open voice proclaim the glad tidings of the Kingdom of Heaven. Knowing the Terrors of the Lord, we are to Exo. Mat.

Cor. 5. perſwade Men to *flee from the wrath to come.* And know-
1. ing the tender Love of God to Mankind, we are to court
them to accept of Mercy and Pardon, and as Ambaſſadors
er. 20. in Chriſts ſtead, beſeech them to be reconcil'd. This will
make our Doctrine drop as the Rain, and our Speech diſtill
as the Dew; gently ſliding through the Ears into the Hearts
of our Hearers, and by a ſweet facility inſinuating it ſelf
om. 10. into their Will and Affections: And then how beautiful will
5. be the feet of them that thus preach the Goſpel of Peace,
and bring glad tidings of good things?

And thus having ſhewed what are the *beſt gifts*, and moſt worthy of our ambition; I proceed,

Secondly, To ſhew how we are to covet them; which our Text tells us, muſt be earneſtly: *Covet earneſtly the beſt gifts.* Now to covet any thing in good earneſt, is not barely to approve of it, nor yet much leſs to ſit down with faint and languiſhing wiſhes after it, but to apply our ſelves to the moſt proper means of attaining it, and to exert the utmoſt of our Powers and Faculties in endeavours after it: And therefore when the Apoſtle adviſeth us to *covet earneſtly the beſt gifts*, he thereby puts us upon uſing the beſt means of becoming Maſters of them. And becauſe it may be asked what they are? I ſhall briefly mind you of theſe four.

1. Diligent Study. 2. Frequent Exercoiſe. 3. Hearty Prayer. And 4. A good Life. Of each of which a word or two diſtinctly. And,

1. We muſt covet theſe Gifts by our diligent Study and earneſt ſearch after them; for this is now the ordinary way and means of acquiring them. Indeed in the days of the Apoſtles, the Spirit was poured out, and came upon them not by Study, but by ſudden Infuſion. The mighty wind in which the Holy Spirit deſcended, was a Symbol of Inſpiration, and betokened the breathing into them the Gifts of

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the Holy Ghost: The Fire that sate upon their Heads, represented that fervency of Spirit, which enabled them with courage to go through all the difficulties of their Office: The Cloven-Tongues bespake the diversity of Languages with which they were endow'd; by which means Illiterate Persons excelled the greatest Rabbies, and Fishermen spake more Languages than the most studied Linguists. But now we are to seek *that* by Industry, which they had by Inspiration; and the Church being arrived at the Stature of a Man in Christ Jesus, God Almighty hath laid aside those extraordinary helps and supports of Infancy: So that Diligence now keeps the Key of Knowledge, and 'tis Study alone that opens to us the Treasures of Wisdom; *Study*, saith the Apostle, *to shew thy self a workman, that needeth not to be ashamed.* To be an Able Divine is a work of Study; and a serious intention of Mind is necessary to the expert and faithful discharge of our Office: We may not now pretend to, or look for Inspiration, nor hope by Dreams and Visions to know the Will of God: No, Ignorance and Folly are the effects of Sloth, whilst Learning and Knowledge are only the Rewards of Industry; *The word is nigh thee*, saith the Apostle, *even in thy mouth, and in thy hand*, oh! let it be in thy Heart too, and make it the daily object of thy Study and Meditation: *We have a sure word of prophesie*, saith St. *Peter, whereunto we do well to take heed, as to a light that shineth in a dark place.* *Solomon* that great Master of Wisdom, exhorts us to seek for Knowledge, and to search diligently for Understanding; yea, he wills us to *search for it as for silver, and to dig for it as for hid treasure*; for though there be some truths that seem to float at top, and to lye open to a careless eye, yet there are others that lye deep, and require a profounder search; here we are to imploy our most composed thoughts, giving our selves to Reading and Meditation, as the first and great means of attaining them.

2 Tim. 2. 15.

Rom. 10. 8.

2 Pet. 1. 19.

Prov. 4.

2. Our ſtudy for theſe Gifts muſt be accompanied with the frequent uſe and exerciſe of them: This will whet our Parts, and ſet an edge on our Faculties, and thereby enable us rightly to divide the Word of Truth. St. *Paul* exhorts
Tim. 6. *Timothy*, to *ſtir up the gift of God that was in him*; ſignifying that 'tis Exerciſe that puts Life and Vigour into our Parts; that blows up thoſe Sparks within us, and quickens them in o a bright and uſeful Flame. Thus to imploy is to improve our Talent, which will daily increaſe by Exerciſe, and like the Widows Cruiſe of Oyl, multiply by being uſed. A lazy neglect of Mens Gifts makes them do the work of the Lord negligently; and for want of a due exerciſe of their own Parts, they do but too much exerciſe the Patience of them that hear them. He that buryed his Talent in the Earth, and he that wrapped it in a Napkin, were both deprived of them, and doom'd as wicked and unprofitable ſervants to outer darkneſs; whereas he that uſed his Talent to his Maſters Honour, was commended for a good and faithful Servant, and enter'd into his Maſters Joy; which makes it evident, that Exerciſe is a good means of improving our Gifts, and procuring to us the Reward of them.

3. To the Exerciſe of our Gifts we muſt add hearty and fervent Prayer for a Bleſſing upon them; for though *Paul*
Cor. 3. may plant, and *Apollo* may water, yet 'tis God alone that
1.5. gives the increaſe. *If any lack wiſdom*, ſaith St. *James*, *let him ask it of God.* Thither our recourſe muſt be, if ever we hope to obtain it; and indeed whither elſe ſhould we
6.68. go? *He only hath the words of eternal life.* To ſeek for Wiſdom only in Books and Writings, is but to ſeek the living among the dead; 'tis the Bleſſing of God that enlivens our indeavours, and makes us rich both in Grace and Knowledge; and he that leaves out this in his ſearch after them, will never arrive to more than what will betray his own
1. Ignorance: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,*

above, and cometh down from the father of lights: And therefore we must look upward, and make our requests known unto him, in whom are hid all the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge; and for our encouragement, the same Apostle tells us, that he *giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not*: And our Blessed Saviour hath assured us, that Earthly Parents are not more willing to give good Gifts to their Children, than our Heavenly Father is to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it. Our desires then of these Gifts must be carried on with unceſsant Petitions to God for them, and if we would attain to any measure of them, we must seek them upon our Knees: for 'tis the Blessing of God that gives the Talent, and the Improvement too; and the Fruits of the Spirit owe all their increase to the Dew of his Heavenly Benediction. Jam. 1. 5. Mat. 7. 11.

Lastly, To our Prayers we must joyn the exercises of Vertue and a Holy Life; for Wisdom enters not into a polluted Soul, nor can so refin'd a perfection inhabit an impure or corrupt Heart: *The carnal mind is enmity against God: It receives not the things of the spirit of God, neither can it know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* And therefore our Hearts must be purged from the corruptions of Sin and Errour, to make way for the entrance of Divine Truths; and our Souls must be consecrated to holy uses, before they can be fit to be the Temples of the Holy Ghost: A good Life will best dispose us to a good Understanding, and sincere desires of pleasing God will make us useful and profitable unto Men. So that if we mean to arrive at any proficiency or growth in Knowledge, we must live up to that whereunto we have already attain'd; for *he that doth the will of my father*, saith our Saviour, *he shall know the doctrine, whether it be of God.* "Divinity (as one hath well "observed on those words) is a Science that we are not so "much to Study, as to Live our selves into: It passes into the Head through the Heart, and our Knowledge will 1 Cor. 14. John 17.

daily

daily increase by the Love and Practice of what we know; for God Almighty delights to communicate his Mind to such as are willing to do it: *The secret of the Lord*, saith the Psalmist, *is with them that fear him, and he will teach them his covenant*: And elsewhere, *The meek he will guide in judgment, and the humble he will teach his way.* He is ever ready to reward the least degree of Obedience to his Will, with farther discoveries of it. And therefore the same ingenious Author hath observed, "That in old time the Men "of extraordinary Revelations were Men of extraordinary "Piety too; and such had most of the secret Will of God "imparted to them that best performed his revealed Will: "They were the *Enochs*, the *Abrahams*, and the *Elijahs*; "and such of whom the Scripture more remarkably testi- "fies, that they walked with God. And surely he that "walketh with another is likely to know more of his "Mind than a stranger, or one that keeps at a distance "from him. In short, Vertue is the most fruitful Principle of Knowledge, and he that doeth what he knows of the Will of God shall be sure to know more of it; *for to him that hath shall be given*, saith our Saviour, *and he shall have abundantly.*

Psal. 25. 9, 14.

And thus I have done with the first part of our Text, having shew'd you what are the *best gifts*, and how we are to covet and seek after them.

But I must crave a little more of your Patience, whilst I shew unto you a more excellent way. And this will bring me to the second part of our Text contained in this Proposition.

II. That the Graces of the Spirit excel the highest and the best Gifts of it. And here I could almost wish for the Tongue of an Angel, to describe to you this *more excellent way*, and to perswade you to walk in it. But St. *Paul* who was rap't up into the third Heaven, hath prevented our wish,

wish, and extoll'd the single Grace of Charity, as high as words can reach, above all other Gifts and Endowments whatever; for in the next words to our Text, he thus delivers himself: Could I speak with the tongue of Men and of Angels, and had all the Charms of Divine and Humane Eloquence; could I dart the brightest Beams of Light into Mens Understanding, and by the most powerful Rhetorick command and insinuate into their Affections, yet without Charity, I am no better than a sounding Brass or a tinkling Cymbal: Had I the Gift of Prophecy, and understood the deepest Mysteries; had I the knowledge of all that is past since the beginning of Time, and could foretel things to come to the end of the World, yea, had I faith strong enough to remove Mountains, and to make the Poles of the World to change their place, yet in all these accomplishments, without Charity, I am nothing, less than nothing and vanity. What could the Tongue of Men or of Angels speak higher in the praise of this Vertue, and to extol the Graces above the Gifts of the Spirit? But there are three things that will plainly demonstrate the preheminence. 1 Cor. 13. 1.

First, The subjects on whom they are bestow'd.
Secondly, The end or use unto which they serve. And,
Thirdly, The term of their duration or continuance.

First, The subjects on whom they are bestowed will give Grace vastly the preheminence; for Gifts like the Rain, and other Common Blessings, are showred down promiscuously on the Good and Bad, and the Light of the Spirit, like that of the Sun, shines indifferently both on the Just and Unjust. *Judas* had the Gifts of Prophesie and Miracles, as well as the other Apostles; and our Saviour hath told us, that *many will say unto him at the last*

Matth. 7. 22. *last day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophecyed in thy name? And in thy name done many wonderful works?* Who yet shall be bid to depart from him as workers of Iniquity. So that the highest and best Gifts neither find, nor give any intrinsick worth to the persons that have them, but leave them many times as bad or worse than they found them; for many who in Christs Name had cast out Devils, will be sentenced by Christ himself to take up their abode for ever with them. But Grace on the other hand stamps an excellence on those that receive it: for it makes them like unto God, and renders them most acceptable to him, and therefore is conferred on none but the particular Favourites and Darlings of Heaven: 'Tis only the excellent ones of Psal. 16. the Earth, as the *Psalmist* stiles them, that walk in this more excellent way, when many gifted Brethren will be found in the broad way that leadeth to destruction. Grace is that Seal of the Spirit, of which the Apostle speaks, Eph. 4. 30. whereby the Children of God *are marked and sealed unto the day of redemption.* 'Tis by this Seal, as the same Apo- 2 Tim. 2. 19. stle tells us, *That the Lord knoweth who are his*; and by this Sacred Stamp or Signature, we too may know whether we belong to him; for the Graces of the Spirit are the particular marks and tokens of the Divine Favour, which are not communicated to any, but the Elect People of God. The Holy Ghost is not wont to cast these Matt. 7. 6. Pearls before Swine, nor is this Childrens Bread given unto Dogs: No, this is reserved as the peculiar Lot and Portion of the Saints, and therefore must far surpass those Common Gifts, that are shared promiscuously by wicked Men.

Secondly, The end or use to which they serve, will farther give Grace the preheminence above the *best gifts*: 1 Cor. 8. *For knowledge*, saith the Apostle, *puffeth up*, and tempts many

many a Man to Pride and Vanity, whereas 'tis Charity that edifieth, 'tis Grace that corrects the swelling quality of Gifts, that layes the foundation in Humility, and thereby builds us up in our most Holy Faith: The greatest Gifts and Abilities, if not accompanied with Grace to direct the use of them, are so far from edifying, that they have in all Ages done the Church the greatest Mischief. How many pestilent Errours and Schisms are owing to the greater parts and abilities of Heretick? What ground hath Atheism and Debauchery got in the World by the Influence and Discourses of the finest Wits? And as the sharpest Razour cuts deepest, so have the quickest Parts made the deepest Wounds in Religion, and Mens Souls: so pernicious are the effects of their ill management both to the Publick and themselves. But Grace is so far from being lyable to these, or the like Abuses, that it prevents the Evil, and corrects the abuses of our Gifts: 'Tis this puts all their usefulness into them, and makes them instead of doing harm, become instruments of much good unto the Church: and consequently 'tis the sanctifying of Gifts, that like the enamelling of Pearls, gives them their main lustre and value. But,

Thirdly. There is another great and surpassing excellency in the Graces above the Gifts of the Spirit, and that is the Duration or Continuance of them: for Grace hath Eternity stamped on it; 'tis coeval with the Spirit of God that gives it, and as Immortal as the Spirit or Soul of Man that receives it. This is more than can be said of the *best gifts*: for of these the Apostle declares in the next Chapter, that they must shortly have an end and be done away: *Whether there be prophesies, saith he, they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be knowledge, that shall vanish away*: But Charity he tells 1 Cor. 8, 9, 1

us shall never fail, and of the Graces of the Spirit, he affirms that they shall abide for ever.

This is an excellency that far transcends all other Perfections whatever; 'tis the disgrace of all Worldly Excellencies, that they are short-liv'd and vanishing; Riches perish in the using, the pleasures of Sin are but for a season, Honour is but a puff of Wind, a bubble that passeth away with the breath that raised it; yea, the most specious and durable accomplishments on this side Religion must all fail, and leave us at the Grave: But Grace goes farther with us, and accompanies us into the other World, where it not only leads to, but makes up the chiefest part of our Felicity. St. *John* tells us, that good Men at their Death rest from their Labours; that is, among other things, from the Laborious Exercise of their Gifts: but their good Works, and the gracious Habits of their Mind follow, and go along with them, and that not only to crown them with a Reward, but to perpetuate the very Action; for Grace differs from Glory not in Kind, but merely in Degree; and those gracious Habits, that are begun and planted in us here, will there grow up into a greater Maturity and Perfection.

Yea, Heaven is nothing else but the Blessed Mansion of Holiness, where that Grace, that is here Militant, and daily struggling with the reliques of corrupt Nature, will there be Triumphant, with a Palm of Victory in her Hand, and a Crown of Gold upon her Head, and the Spirits of just Men in whom it reigns, shall be made perfect, and become more than Conquerours, through Christ that loved them.

And now having by the Blessing of God finished what I at first proposed, give me leave to press the Exhortation of the Text, with respect both to the Gifts and Graces of the Spirit. And,

First, Let me exhort you to *covet earnestly the best gifts*; that is, to labour for the most useful and edifying Abilities, whereby you may best serve the Church, and profit your Hearers. And here if I could ever hope to prevail, methinks it might be reasonably expected from such an Assembly as this, consisting of Persons, whose great business it is to instruct others in the Knowledge and Practice of Divine Things: Know then, my Brethren, that this is the main end of our Ministry, and the design of all our Spiritual Gifts, and therefore hither should all our aimes and indeavours tend. Remember that you are the Mouth of the People unto God, to make known their Requests unto him; and you are the Mouth of God unto the People to make known his Will unto them: The faithful discharge of both these may indeed require no small Labour, but 'twill be abundantly recompensed with a great Reward.

In your Prayers then affect not Novelty or Variety of Expressions, which are no way pleasing unto God: But let all your Addresses unto him be in fit Words, and in all the decent Postures of Humility and Adoration. Read the Publick Prayers of the Church with Reverence and devout Affections, that the Hearers Zeal may be enkindled by the pious ardours of your Devotion.

In your Preaching shew *Uncorruptness, Gravity, Sincerity, and sound Speech, that cannot be condemned, that he who is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil* Tit. 7, 8.

thing to say of you. So shall you put a muzzle upon the prophane Mouths, and cut off all occasion from them that seek occasion against you. Stir up your People to Love and to good Works; for these things are good and profitable unto Men; and when they are thus forced to approve your Labours, you will be the better able to convince gainsayers, and to strike detractors dumb. Do not entertain Vulgar Hearers with nice and curious speculations, which rather perplex than inform their Minds, but let all your Discourses to them be evermore plain and practical, leaving matters of Dispute to the Schools, or more Learned Auditories. Avoid all things that may engender Strife, or lead to Faction, and follow those things that make for Peace, and things whereby ye may edifie one another. Do not use your Gifts to Pride and Vain-glory, for this is to make the Breathings of the Holy Ghost, subservient to the vain Breath of the Multitude, which cannot but grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and do despight to the Spirit of Grace. Beware of abusing your Parts to the Maintenance of Schism and Divisions, but rather use your utmost Prudence to heal those Breaches which open too wide a gap for Atheism, Confusion, and every evil work. Suit all your Discourses both to the Necessities, and likewise to the Capacities of your Hearers, having Milk for Babes, and stronger Meat for riper Christians: In a word, Feed your Flocks with sound Doctrine, and go before them by a pious Example, that they may safely both hear your Voice, and follow you.

But I may not conclude without minding you of the *more excellent way*, and calling upon you to walk and keep in it; that is, to covet more earnestly the Graces than the Gifts of the Spirit: We have seen how far the one excells the other; that 'tis Grace alone that sanctifies our Gifts,

and gives them all their worth and excellence: This therefore justly calls for our most earnest Prayers and Endeavours; *'Tis good*, saith the Apostle, *to have the heart established with grace*, yea much better than to have the Head stuffed with Knowledge; for this may but aggravate our Condemnation, whilst the other will secure and increase our Felicity. Grace is indeed the greatest thing that God can give, or that we can receive; for, 'tis a Ray of the Divinity, the very Character or Image of God stampd upon the Soul, and what higher thing can the most elevated Ambition raise our Wishes to? Wherefore let our desires and endeavours after it bear some proportion to its transcendent worth and excellency; let us open our Mouths wide, that we may be filled with the Spirit, and let the cry of our Devotions, like the acclamations at the Building of the Temple, be evermore, Grace, Grace. But let us especially, to whom the World hath given the stile of Spiritual Persons, pray for a double portion of the Spirit, that God would furnish us with his Gifts, to promote his Glory and the good of Mankind, and sanctifie them with his Grace, that we may use them to those ends, that as we excel others in the Holiness of our Profession, so we may in the Holiness of our Lives too, *adding to our knowledge vertue, to vertue temperance, to temperance patience, to patience brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity*; for if these things be in us and abound, they will truly enoble our Minds, adorn our Profession, and dignifie us far above all Earthly Preferments. In a word my Brethren! see that ye come behind in no Gift, being enrich'd in all knowledge, and in all utterance, that ye may speak as the Oracles of God, and that all your Speeches may administer Grace to the Hearers: So shall ye shine as Lights in this World, and as Stars of the first Magnitude in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Heb. 13. 9. Psal. 81. 10. Zech. 4. 2 Pet. 1. 5, 6, 7.

Which

Which that we may all do, I shall conclude with the excellent Collect appointed for this day.

Almighty and most Merciful God, of whose only Gift it cometh, that thy faithful People do unto thee any true and laudable Service; grant us thy Grace, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this Life, that we fail not finally to attain thy Heavenly Promises, through the Merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FINIS.